

## ASSEMBLY OF CAPTIVE EUROPEAN NATIONS

The meeting which the ACEN held in Strasbourg in July 1955 provided the first opportunity to observe the Assembly in action. According to the American Consul in Strasbourg, 1/ many of the delegates were overly optimistic regarding the impending liberation of the Satellites. The main cause of this optimism appeared to be their belief that the USSR is weaker than is generally thought and that continuous pressure from the West would force a Soviet withdrawal from Eastern Europe.

The Assembly's official position rejecting neutralization of the Satellite area and demanding freedom of choice for the Eastern European countries did not seem to be reflected in the thinking of individual delegates. The American Consul estimated that, if the USSR were to offer neutralization of the Satellite area coupled with free elections in exchange for the neutralization of all of Germany, few of the delegates would be unconditionally opposed. Almost all delegates officially rejected war as a solution of the problem on the grounds that there would be little left to liberate in Eastern Europe after an atomic conflict, and therefore they placed the date of liberation rather far in the future.

Although some delegates announced that "those who have shared their suffering will be the future leaders" of the captive nations, rather than the emigres, many members (particularly Auer of Hungary and Dimitrov of Bulgaria) privately spoke of their rapidly approaching return as political leaders. The ACEN meeting was reported in most Western European newspapers, generally without much comment. The general attitude at the Council of Europe toward the ACEN could best be described as one of sympathy and moral support mixed with the realization that little can be done to help the cause. The American Consul estimated that the anti-Communism of the ACEN delegates at times tended to blur their objectivity.

The ACEN held its second annual meeting in Strasbourg in April 1956. According to the American Vice Consul in Strasbourg, 2/ the consensus of the meeting was that the USSR was in the midst of a serious crisis and that the West must immediately press for concessions. Many delegates

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believed that the Soviet Union is on the verge of collapse and even seemed convinced that the USSR could be forced into the position of allowing free elections in the Satellites which would result in their return to power.

Some delegates showed less optimism in private conversations, but many seemed sincerely to believe that the Soviet Union is indeed facing revolt in its midst and if the United States were to press its considerable advantage much could be done to bring about the disintegration of the Communist empire. The American Vice Consul further commented that the various national and political differences which separated the ACEN delegates before they fled their native countries continued to exist and their union in anti-Communism has had the unfortunate tendency to break down when former or stronger nationalistic aspirations came to the fore. Nevertheless, the Assembly was successful in getting the publicity which it felt to be essential. 3/